

Sound Check

MM's regular
spotlight on
instruments

LAURIE Wisefield, half of the blistering guitar duo that gives Wishbone Ash its now famous (and much copied) twin guitar sound, is not one of the tallest guitar players around.

But with fellow lead guitarist Andy Powell he must be one of the best. His playing combines a fierceness of attack with an emotional appeal that brought Wembley's Empire Pool audience to its feet last week and nobody sat down again for the next hour.

So how did he start? "I got my first guitar when I was about eight. That was a Unicorn acoustic guitar, which cost about £6. I was really into the Shadows then, and I kept pestering my father for an electric one, but he made me learn to play about a dozen tunes before he got me one."

"That was a Watkins Rapier 33, which I plugged straight into the tape recorder, which then blew up. So my father had to buy me a Watkins amp as well."

Like many other rock guitarists, Laurie has had very little formal instruction, learning mainly from listening to records and copying them.

"I had a few lessons for about a month from a guy who wasn't really a guitar teacher at all but who taught me a few scales. I learnt mainly from records — Elvis and the Shadows — and I started playing for semi-pro bands when I was about 13."

The first official group he joined was Sugar, which also included Chris Williams, later to be in Home with Laurie.

"Eventually I got a Mar-

Wisefield's wise words



LAURIE WISEFIELD: learned how to play from Elvis and Shadows records

shall amp and a Gibson SG, which was the first good guitar I had. I used it on the first Home album. Then, just as the British blues thing was starting, with people like Peter Green and Clapton coming up, I got into country music and guitarists like

Albert Lee.

"So I bought a Fender Telecaster for its really clean sound, which is perfect for country music, and at the same time I got a five-string Bacon and David banjo, which was about 30 years old."

His next purchase was an eight-string Fender steel guitar, followed by another Fender, a Stratocaster, which he bought from Richard Thompson of Fairport Convention.

"Tony Zemaitas made me a

special alloy-fronted guitar with a built-in pre-amp and 24 frets, and it was after getting that one that I really started to collect guitars seriously," Laurie said.

Peter Frampton provided him with his next one, a Les Paul Gold Top '57. Did he get a lot of his instruments from fellow guitarists?

"No, mostly from dealers. If you go to a few dealers regularly, they get to know when you're around and if there's anything they've got which they think you'd like, they get in touch with you."

Laurie uses two guitars more than any others at the moment — a 1954 Stratocaster and a Telecaster.

"I got the Strat for about

\$300 and it was really filthy and battered, but it's perfect for the band with its full sound. I've cut down on the number of guitars I take on tour with me — I've only got four this time — because I think it's much better to keep it simple on stage."

With 15 minutes to go before he went on stage to play for 8,000 people, Laurie was understandably concerned about the time. But he found enough to reflect on the difference in his playing now, compared with his days with Home.

"I was probably more into playing technically then, and I had a very different role within the band, which itself was a lot more free than

Wishbone. I was playing with more of a country-jazz style than the straight rock I do now."

"The guitars were the same — a Strat and a Tele — but I play a lot less now, and a lot louder."

Laurie looks at guitars in two ways these days — as player and as collector.

"There are some guitars that you can buy just as good investments. A '57 Les Paul in mint condition is a fantastic guitar, but it's also something that's going to appreciate in value."

"As far as buying one to play is concerned, I can tell as soon as I pick it up. If a guitar feels good but doesn't sound right, you can always change it until it does. But if it feels uncomfortable, you're not going to make it sound right whatever you do."

"I set up the action on my guitars quite high, which helps to give a really clean sound, not quite as percussive as it would be normally. I like a sound without any buzzes in it. Raising the action is very easy, I just put a couple of washers under the bridge and you can vary it as much as you like."

Playing with Wishbone, Laurie and Andy both find themselves playing in harmony and rhythm guitar styles, as well as lead.

"I used to play harmony guitar with Home but it was very different," Laurie said. "Andy and I always try to match the sounds. If we wanted a flutey sort of sound with lots of sustain, then we'd pick a Gibson."

"Normally what you write decides the instrument you use. But rhythm guitar generally is a very important factor, and I enjoy doing it."

DAVID BOOTHROYD

Trade Winds

NORLIN have followed hot on the heels of Lowrey's new Symphonic Citation spinet organ with the Lowrey Contempo 80, which really has a look of elegance. It has been housed in a completely new design cabinet which is extremely attractive and looks at home in the most modern surroundings. Rich, hand-rubbed walnut, brushed aluminium accents and smoked perspex music rest combine with every other Lowrey feature. ACC, short for Automatic Chord Computer, transforms one-finger melodies into full chords. The magic Genes offers automatic bass and accompaniment. The Golden Harp gives beautiful arpeggios and there are Symphonic Strings for a string ensemble. The Orchestral Symphoniser for brass, reeds and voices completes a versatile instrument.

FARFISA UK are using the medium of television to advertise their range of home organs throughout the autumn, using the inviting theme "Come Home To A Farfisa". Their 15-second cartoon style advertisement will be shown on ATV, Granada, Yorkshire, Anglia and Harlech TV. The £50,000 scheme will be carefully monitored and if considered successful will be extended to other areas. Full back-up material has been supplied to all dealers and it is estimated that the message will be seen in 11 million homes.

STATUS QUO recently visited the Shoeburyness factory of CBS/Arbiter to try out and take away 20 Vox AC30 amplifiers for their forthcoming engagements. The resurgence of interest

in these veteran amps not only surrounds the nostalgic revival of the Shadows, the Hollies and similar well-remembered groups, but has spread to the punk rock bands, led by the Damned. Queen have always featured Vox heavily and Beatlemania, the musical show currently playing to full houses in New York, has led to increased sales of Vox on the other side of the Atlantic.

THE Investigation magazine Which? carried out an extensive research on stereo amplifiers in its October 1977 issue, pointing out the need for perfection in view of the fact that the stereo amp is the hub of a hi-fi set. They tested 22 costing from £40 to over £150 and gave their conclusions on the best buys, notably whether more expensive ones gave a better sound. Which? is available only to members of the Consumers' Association, 14 Buckingham Street, London WC2N 6DS, who will be pleased to supply details.

PETE TULETT, one of the liveliest and best-liked salesmen in the musical instrument business, has quit Rosetti, whose staff he joined as director of sales for the UK in 1973, becoming director of sales for the home and export markets in 1975. He has had offers to take up some agencies within the music industry and quips: "Statistics show that there were 10,112 failed businesses last year. With odds like that, the challenge was too strong to resist!" — CHRIS HAYES.